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16 Meriden Road  
Rockfall  
Connecticut 06481-2961  
Tele: 860-346-TREE  
www.ctwoodlands.org

*Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association*

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Support/ Oppose
<b>RAISED BILL 6998.</b> AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONVEYANCE OF CERTAIN PARCELS OF STATE LAND.	Oppose Sections 3, 8, 14 & 15

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For 120 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on sustainable forestry, state parks and forests, trail recreation, natural resource protection, and land conservation issues.

I am testifying today in opposition to Sections 3, 8, 14, and 15 of Raised Bill 6998 (a.k.a. "the Conveyance Act"). For 120 years, CFPA has supported efforts to establish and protect State Parks and Forests for the benefit of all people in Connecticut. If existing public lands are to be conveyed for some private, municipal, or other use, there must be a significant benefit to the greater public. The sections of this Conveyance Act that we oppose are those where there is limited or unknown public benefit compared to what the public is being asked to give away.

**Section 3.** Once the site for the town of Milford's landfill and ~75 residences destroyed by hurricane Diane in 1955, Silver Sands State Park has undergone an amazing transformation and today is one of the State's most beautiful beaches and diverse wildlife habitats. The town of Milford has been commendable in supporting the Park's ecological rejuvenation and has encouraged public use and recreation in many ways over the years. When the landfill and residences were gifted to the State for Silver Sands, the town was ill-equipped to care for the site or incur the expenses associated with remediation over time. Now, the town wants part of Silver Sands back for "municipal purposes, including to ensure public access to open space and to the Milford Animal Control Shelter, to mitigate parking demand, to promote public health and safety by ensuring emergency access and to create coastal retreat areas to enhance storm resiliency." We understand that the town's leadership is representing legitimate local concerns, but we cannot support that conveying this land to the town is in the best overall interests of the public.

There are a few problems with the town's assertions. First, the areas proposed as "retreat areas for storm resiliency" are located in the coastal flood zone that would be affected by a storm surge from Long Island Sound (generally not where you want to locate a retreat area). The town also proposes to ensure public access to open space and to the Milford Animal Control shelter, but it appears that there already is adequate public access to the Park and to the shelter (although it should again be noted that the shelter is located in the coastal flood zone which is certainly not ideal). It appears that the town is trying to avoid the possibility of DEEP charging an admissions fee at some point in the future by seizing some municipal parking that reaches into the interior of the Park.

We understand that the town would not like its residents to pay to access Silver Sands, but because of the significant public use and the many millions of dollars in investments made in the Park by the State, this should be a place where a parking fee is quite appropriate. People who are walking or biking into the Park would not have to pay a fee, senior citizens get a free Parks pass, and the town simply cannot expect to secure an exclusive right to access a State Park while offering nothing in return. We hope the town will 1) ask to remove this section of the Conveyance Act, 2) look at options for parking on municipal lands, and 3) will work with DEEP on negotiating a solution that is mutually beneficial outside of the Conveyance Act process.

**Section 8.** We are pleased to hear that the town of Fairfield may have requested to remove this section of the Conveyance Act. It seemed to be a strange addition to the Conveyance Act since the land in question was already encumbered by conservation restrictions, and there was no plan to change the use of these lands from anything other than open space. The Centennial Watershed Forest is probably the state's best example of State land that is protected by a conservation restriction, and has its lands managed through a 3-party agreement that brings DEEP, Aquarion Water Company, and The Nature Conservancy together. CFPA is also pleased to be a part of this partnership through the maintenance of the Aspetuck and Saugatuck Trails that wind through the Centennial Watershed Forest. This Forest should be kept out of the Conveyance Act now and forever.

**Sections 3 and 8 as well as Sections 14 and 15** of the Conveyance Act are just the most recent examples for why the Conveyance Act should be accompanied by maps of the parcels in question. Sections 14 and 15 are complex proposals to extract sand and gravel as well as gain access to transport the materials across State lands. Both conveyances have many moving pieces including swaps of other lands, water diversion rights, and/or financial compensation to the State. In the short time available to analyze this bill, we are unable to ascertain whether there are significant public benefits that would offset these proposals that appear to primarily benefit individual business operations.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill. I would be glad to respond to any questions you may have.